



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**RURAL DEVELOPMENT MARKS EARTH DAY, ANNOUNCES \$108 MILLION IN RURAL WATER
AND WASTEWATER PROJECTS**

Pilger, Neb., April 22, 2002— Deputy Under Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development Mike Neruda today announced over \$108 million in rural water and wastewater projects, and urged Americans to observe Earth Day by reaffirming their commitment to protecting the earth's air, water, and land.

"Each of us bears the responsibility of being good stewards of the resources entrusted to us, not only for ourselves, but for generations yet to come," said Neruda. "We need to remember that every day is Earth Day, especially for rural Americans, who live close to the land and make their livings from it."

Neruda said that USDA Rural Development, through its Rural Utilities Service (RUS), is doing its part by working with rural communities across America to build and modernize water and wastewater disposal systems. "Today we are announcing the funding of 46 projects to build and improve rural water and sewage systems, totaling nearly \$108 million," said Neruda. "Today, in rural communities in 34 states, Rural Development is observing the importance of Earth Day. Rural communities are doing their part to preserve our earth by installing or upgrading water and wastewater systems to be in compliance with environmental requirements. Hundreds of thousands of Americans will benefit through cleaner water for municipal supplies, recreation, and wildlife resources."

One example of the projects announced today is located in Pilger, Nebraska. Through over \$1.3 million in USDA Rural Development funds, a sewer improvement project will be developed that will ensure safe and dependable sanitary sewer services to Pilger's 378 residents. The USDA monies are leveraged with \$250,000 from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

"Pilger's \$1.6 million sewer improvement project will help protect the environment by bringing the village's wastewater system back into compliance with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality's regulations," stated Robert Prochaska, rural development specialist for USDA Rural Development in Nebraska. "Additionally sewer services will be provided to more rural residents."

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The village's existing mechanical wastewater treatment facility dates back to 1961. Due to aging, the treatment facility's components are in need of replacement including the existing lift station. As a result, raw wastewater in the spring is bypassed to the Elkhorn River due to the plant's inability to handle the flow. The southern one-third of Pilger's present sewer collection system dates back to 1910 and requires additional maintenance and repairs as the sewer lines are failing and are plagued with high infiltration, plugging and ground settlement. The residents in west Pilger, not served with a sewer collection system, use septic tanks, which are failing and are discharging raw waste into adjoining road ditches.

The proposed sewer system project entails the construction of a new collection system in the southern and western portions of the village and the development of a multiple cell lagoon treatment facility. Through these improvements, the village's sewer system will meet required state health and safety standards.



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USDA Rural Development serves as the lead federal entity for rural development needs and administers financial and technical assistance through three agencies: Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service and Rural Utilities Service. Further information on USDA Rural Development can be obtained by contacting any USDA Service Center or by visiting the USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

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NOTE: The 60 plus Earth Day events being held across the United States represent \$142 million in USDA funds for water and wastewater projects. This amount includes the \$108 million announced today by Deputy Under Secretary Neruda.

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